

ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNANCE

Introduction and Overview to the Module

The *Organization and Governance* module of the *Connecting Communities Toolkit* provides guidance to communities that are creating a new organization to coordinate health information exchange. To be successful, health information exchange (HIE) initiatives should be supported by a strong organizational infrastructure and governance process. Forming a new organizational infrastructure and governance model is often the first task a community faces, and one of the most important. Without an effective organization, local efforts to promote HIE will likely fail.

The *Organization and Governance* module will be most helpful for early stage communities that are just beginning to coalesce around HIE activities. However, more mature HIE initiatives may also derive some value from this module as a means to evaluate the progress and decisions they have already made, and to identify potential improvements to their organizational structure.

Organizations that are given the responsibility to build and manage HIE within a community have a very difficult task. They must align practical considerations and political forces to achieve buy-in and ensure the new organization delivers results. The exact balance required to achieve this result will vary from one community to another. However, there are several basic issues and questions that are common across all communities, as follows:

- **What stakeholders will participate in the organization, and what rights will each stakeholder group have?** As demonstrated by eHealth Initiative's Second Annual Survey of State, Regional, and Community-Based Health Information Exchanges and Organizations, there is a long list of potential stakeholders to invite to the HIE table, and different communities have made different decisions on this question. In general, eHI urges communities to include as many different stakeholders as possible, representing health care providers, employers, health plans, and consumers. All these groups have an interest in HIE, and their active support is a key ingredient for success.
- **Will a new organization be formed or will an existing organization take on responsibility for HIE? Or will HIE be governed by a loose collaborative?** Here again, different communities have taken different approaches. The best strategy depends primarily on whether there is an existing organization that already meets the community's needs for promoting HIE. In that case, there is no reason to "reinvent the wheel". If no such organization exists locally, then one must be created.
- **Will the organization be for-profit or not-for-profit?** Here, financing issues may come to the fore. If the HIE effort will be funded primarily through government dollars and/or grants – and the eHI survey found this to be the most common financing method for HIE initiatives – then a not-for-profit structure may be most appropriate. If private financing will be obtained, then a for-profit structure may be preferable. Some communities have developed a hybrid model.

The precise answers for many organizational questions will vary from community to community

based on local needs and preferences. The critical point is that these questions are answered definitively and that a single organization emerges which is recognized within the community as taking the lead in planning and promoting HIE. Lack of clarity about HIE leadership will result in confusion and multiple HIE efforts potentially working at cross purposes. It is worthwhile for community health care leaders to spend the time and energy required to create an effective, credible organization, or else they will need to work harder to compensate for the organization's weaknesses later.

The *Organization and Governance* module of the *Connecting Communities Toolkit* provides:

- Common principles and early activities for creating an organizational infrastructure and governance model;
- A roadmap for creating a strong organizational infrastructure and governance model;
- Comprehensive tools and resources to help you launch your health information exchange initiative.